

NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE

FLEXIPLACE PROGRAM

JANUARY 2001

**NATIONAL OCEAN SERVICE
FLEXIPLACE PROGRAM GUIDELINES**

The National Ocean Service (NOS) is continually working to provide a quality worklife for its employees. The Flexiplace program provides a wide range of benefits to employees and the organization with proper and judicious implementation. A Flexiplace program is offered to all NOS offices. NOS has adopted both the DOC Office of Administration Guidelines for Flexiplace Participation and the NOAA Supplemental Guidelines (see attached) with additional NOS guidelines described below. It is critical that all supervisors/managers and interested employees read all the guidelines before making a decision to participate in the NOS Flexiplace Program.

Flexiplace is a management option, rather than an employee right, and does not change the terms and conditions of employment. There is no automatic right of the employee to continue participation in the event of a change of supervisor, work situation, or job requirement. The overall interests of the office must take precedence over working at the alternative work site. Flexiplace must not adversely affect the performance of the employee who is participating or his/her co-workers. Flexiplace is not a substitute for dependent care. During established work hours, the participant should make arrangements for child care, elder care and any other dependent care so that the employee's ability to complete work assignments is not adversely affected. The office's workload will be distributed equitably, and methods will be instituted to ensure that office employees are not saddled with the Flexiplace participant's responsibilities.

ADDITIONAL NOS FLEXIPLACE GUIDELINES

APPROVAL AUTHORITY: The Assistant Administrator, NOS, has the approval authority for full participation in a Flexiplace Program and any requests for exceptions to this program. Participation in the program on an ad-hoc, short-term basis to accommodate special needs as described below is hereby redelegated to Program and Staff Office Directors.

Full participation in the Flexiplace Program is defined as:

- Participating in the program as identified in the NOS/NOAA/DOC guidelines. Under normal circumstances, employees should work a

minimum of three days in the conventional office (or two days for those employees working AWS schedules with a day off).

- Meeting the selection/screenout criteria in Attachment C.

Participating in the Flexiplace Program on an Ad-hoc/Short Term Basis to Accommodate Special Needs is defined as:

- 120 days or less for medical or family need purposes and extensions to an initial request. Total time of initial request and extensions must not exceed 6 months. Examples of these would be: (1) working at home during personal convalescence from a short-term injury or illness; and (2) time saved from not having to commute would allow employee to work and take sick or convalescing family members to doctor's appointments and/or therapy sessions.

- Intermittent for 5 days or less for each critical or time-sensitive project. If this option is renewed more than 3 successive times, the supervisor/team leader should look at requesting this under the full-time flexiplace option.

QUALIFYING POSITIONS: All employees except supervisors and team leaders who work mostly in an independent manner (refer to Attachment A, Guidelines for Selecting Flexiplace Participants). This includes part-time employees and NOAA Corps Officers. Supervisors and team leaders may be allowed to participate for ad-hoc/short-term situations only.

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: It is expected that no more than 10 percent of the NOS workforce will be participating in the program at any one time.

ASSOCIATED COSTS: Government payment of costs for installation of computers and associated equipment and additional telephone installation and/or basic services, should be determined on a case by case basis. Either the employee or organization should already have the basic equipment to do the work.

GENERAL SCHEDULES: Employees will work within the already established NOS AWS schedules or union-negotiated agreements.

ALTERNATE WORKSITES: Employees can "Work-at-Home" only.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS: The anticipated benefits are: (1) attracting and retaining a high-quality work force; (2) reducing employee absenteeism and accommodating employees with health

problems while they are still able and want to work; (3) reducing commuting time and costs; (4) increased flexibility in coordinating work priorities with personal and family responsibilities; (5) improved employment opportunities for the disabled and mobility-restricted persons; (6) reduced traffic congestion and its associated health, pollution and energy problems.

EVALUATION: Every six months the Management & Budget Office will conduct an evaluation of the Flexiplace Program. Supervisors/team leaders and participants are required to complete evaluation questionnaires. Program and Staff Offices must retain records of Ad-hoc/Short Term participation that they have approved for reporting purposes and also be prepared to complete evaluation questionnaires.

PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS:

1. Interested supervisors, team leaders and employees read all guidelines.
2. Supervisor, employee's team leader (if applicable) and employee meets to discuss and complete Attachment B - Flexiplace Program Employee/Supervisor Agreement (NOS version), Attachment C - Screen Out Criteria Checklist, and Attachment D - Flexiplace Safety Inspection Checklist.
3. A justification and request for a Flexiplace arrangement is prepared by the supervisor/team leader including Attachments B through D. This request must be endorsed by the employee's immediate supervisor and then cleared up through the chain of command before submission to the Program or Staff Office Director. The following additional information is required for participation on an Ad-Hoc, Short-Term Basis:
 - a. Arrangements based on medical needs must be for 120 days or less. A doctor's written certification must be submitted with the request stating the nature of the employee's illness, what type of work the employee is allowed to do, and the benefits that would be achieved from using Flexiplace. Other information may also be used by management to assist with evaluating the medical need.
 - b. Arrangements based on family care needs must be for 120

days or less. Flexiplace is not a substitute for dependent care. An explanation must be included on Attachment C - Screen Out Criteria Checklist, describing how the employee's time will be allocated for work at the office and work at home, and how this can be accommodated with family care responsibilities at home. Attachment E cites some examples of appropriate family care arrangements.

c. Requests for extension of an arrangement for medical or family needs (up to 6 months total) must be initiated by the employee, and include:

1. An updated doctor's written certification regarding the continuing medical need, or an updated description of the family care need;

2. An evaluation by the immediate supervisor/team leader of the employee's performance while on Flexiplace. It is the burden of the employee to demonstrate that the transferred office function can be effectively performed at home; and

3. A revised/updated work plan from the supervisor/team leader.

d. For arrangements based on intermittent critical or time-sensitive projects of 5 days or less for each instance, explain what type of projects might require this arrangement and how working at home would be beneficial in getting the work done. Also, include the approximate number of times over the Flexiplace contract period the employee may need to work intermittently at home. Renewals to an intermittent option must also be resubmitted with an evaluation of previous arrangements. If this option should be renewed more than 3 successive times, the supervisor/team leader should look at requesting this under the full-time flexiplace option.

All renewals to previously approved full participation Flexiplace arrangements must be sent to the AA for approval. Submit the requested paperwork, updated if necessary, an explanation of any changes from the prior agreement, and a brief evaluation of the prior Flexiplace arrangement.

4a. Full Participation - Request is approved or disapproved by the Program or Staff Office Director. Approved Flexiplace

arrangements are then submitted through the Management and Budget Office for the AA's approval. The Program or Staff Office Director is notified in writing of the decision and, if approved, continues the process of participating in a Flexiplace arrangement.

4b. Ad-Hoc/Short-Term Participation - Request is approved or disapproved by the Program or Staff Office Director. The Supervisor/Employee is notified in writing of the decision and, if approved, continues the process of participating in a Flexiplace arrangement.

5. In approved Flexiplace arrangements, the employee's supervisor/team leader will contact their servicing Human Resources office to schedule required training for the employee participant and supervisor/team leader. Training is required only at the first request and not needed for subsequent renewals unless a major policy change has occurred.

6. Begin Flexiplace!

ATTACHMENTS

- DOC Office of Administration Guidelines for Flexiplace Participation
- NOAA Supplemental Guidelines
- Attachment A - Guidelines for Selecting Flexiplace Participants
- Attachment B - Flexiplace Program, Employee/Supervisor Agreement
- Attachment C - Screen Out Criteria Checklist
- Attachment D - Flexiplace Safety Inspection Checklist
- Attachment E - Family Care Needs

DOC OFFICE OF ADMINISTRATION GUIDELINES FOR FLEXIPLACE PARTICIPATION

Flexiplace Pilot Program

December 1993

BACKGROUND

Flexiplace, also known as flexible workplace, work-at-home, telecommuting, and teleworking, refers to paid employment performed away from the conventional office, either at home or at an alternative office, for an agreed-upon portion of the workweek. Flexiplace should not be confused with home-based businesses or independent contractor arrangements in the home. It is also quite different from situations where employees permanently work out of their home, traveling daily to clients or audit and inspection sites on premises not controlled by their employers.

Flexiplace in the Federal government grew from a project begun in 1990. The President's Council on Management Improvement (PCMI) sponsored the government-wide Flexible Workplace Project to examine the feasibility of flexible workplace arrangements, on a limited basis, through pilot tests. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the General Services Administration (GSA) were given key roles in coordinating and evaluating flexiplace arrangements on behalf of the PCMI.

During this test period, the home was the primary alternative work site. OPM has evaluated the two-year pilot performance of the work-at-home component of the project and has found it to be successful. OPM supports the concept of flexiplace when practiced judiciously, and agencies now have authority to make flexible arrangements regarding where employees perform their work.

Recently, GSA has begun to implement three telecommuting centers in nearby Maryland and Virginia communities for use by Federal employees who work in the Washington, D.C. area. The telecommuting centers are financed by a \$5 million appropriation and are established in cooperation with local business and political officials and interested Federal agencies. The telecommuting centers offer an alternative workplace in outlying locations and provide needed data processing equipment and telecommunications and administrative support. This Federal telecommuting center pilot project has been approved as a Reinvention Laboratory.

BENEFITS

Flexiplace is an innovative management tool that can provide a variety of benefits. Employers can benefit by attracting and

retaining a high-quality work force, reducing employee absenteeism and accommodating employees with health problems while they are still able and want to work. Employees can benefit by reduced commuting time and costs, capitalizing on their peak productivity periods, and increased flexibility in coordinating work priorities with personal and family responsibilities. Society and the environment can benefit by improved employment opportunities for the disabled and mobility-restricted persons, reduced problems associated with dependent care, reduced traffic congestion and its associated health, pollution and energy problems.

PURPOSE

This flexiplace guide provides advice and instruction to supervisors and employees of the Office of Administration who participate in a Flexiplace Pilot Program. Flexiplace locations may include the employee's home (a space specifically set aside as an office or other appropriate area in the employee's residence) or GSA telecommuting centers. No supervisor or employee will be required to participate in the pilot program, nor is participation an employee right. The Office of Administration Flexiplace Pilot Program will test alternatives to the traditional work environment and evaluate potential benefits.

POLICY

Administration Directors may present proposals to participate in the flexiplace pilot program to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Administration for approval. Presenting a proposal is intended to be a "one-time" event necessary to establish the general parameters for participation. Therefore, a proposal does not have to be so specific as to name participants, specify individual employee schedules, and the like. The proposal, however, must address the types of positions involved, anticipated numbers of employees, associated costs, general schedules to be used, alternative work sites, and anticipated benefits. Supervisors are responsible for determining, in consultation with their respective Office Directors, if positions are appropriate for off-site work and for examining both the content of the work and the performance of the employee. Once the parameters for participation have been approved by the Deputy Assistant Secretary, supervisors may recommend to their superiors pilot program participants and specify the conditions of participation. Administration Directors are delegated the authority to approve such recommendations.

A Flexiplace Work Agreement is required for all participants. One is included in this guide. In addition, Administration Directors are responsible for ensuring that periodic evaluations of the pilot program will be performed. The Office of Human Resources Management will assist with appropriate evaluation methodology.

Employees are not required to participate in the pilot program, nor is participation an employee right. Because this is a

supervisory work option, there is no automatic right of the employee to continue participation in the event of a change of supervisor, work situation, or job requirements. Administration Directors or supervisors may end participation in the program for individuals, an organizational segment or the entire office if operational problems occur that interfere with the service mission of the organization. In addition, flexiplace arrangements are not an employee right. The overall interests of the office must take precedence over working off-site on a scheduled off-site day if a conflict arises. Supervisors may make adjustments of individual schedules to meet the needs of the office. Administration Directors and supervisors shall provide sufficient notice whenever feasible, prior to cancelling an employee's participation or modifying the flexiplace arrangements.

PROGRAM OVERSIGHT

Administration Directors are responsible for the overall efficient management of the Office of Administration Flexiplace Pilot Program and all reporting requirements within their respective offices. Supervisory officials are responsible for day-to-day operations, adjustments of individual flexiplace arrangements to meet the needs of the units they supervise, and maintaining records and information necessary for Administration Directors to evaluate the program.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Selection of participants for this pilot program is a key activity. While there is no fail-safe formula to assure success, the most common characteristics of successful flexiplace participants and criteria for selection are described below.

Identifying the Employee

The employee has demonstrated self-starter characteristics, can function independently and has demonstrated dependability.

The employee has good time management and organization skills.

The employee possesses a high level of skill and job knowledge.

The employee's overall performance evaluations are equivalent to fully successful or higher.

The employee has clearly defined performance standards.

The employee is willing to sign and abide by a written agreement defining participation and expectations.

If the alternative work site is the home, the employee is able to satisfy home work station requirements, including necessary equipment, privacy, lack of interruptions, and security of data.

Identifying the Supervisor

The supervisor is a proponent of the project.

The supervisor is comfortable with evaluating work performance by measuring performance by results and without direct observation.

The supervisor is an effective communicator and able to clearly define tasks and expectations and provide ongoing feedback.

Identifying the Position

Many different positions lend themselves to successful flexiplace arrangements. Each position should be examined, and specifically, distinct activities, functions, and tasks. In many cases, some portion of the position may be performed in a flexiplace environment.

Work activities are portable and can be performed effectively outside the conventional office.

Job tasks primarily are measurable or primarily project oriented.

Contact with other employees and serviced clientele is predictable.

Work contacts can be easily adjusted to allow for telephone communications or conducted when the flexiplace employee is at the conventional office.

The technology needed to perform the work off-site is currently available.

Security of data can be adequately assured.

Access to specialized equipment or materials not present at the off-site location can be grouped and scheduled for days when the flexiplace employee is in the conventional office.

FLEXIPLACE WORK AGREEMENT

Prior to participation, flexiplace participants and their supervisors will jointly sign a work agreement that can be terminated at any time by either supervisors or employees. The work agreement, which is included in this guide, covers the terms and conditions of the flexiplace pilot program. The work agreement constitutes an agreement by employees and supervisors to adhere to applicable guidelines and policies. The work agreement covers items such as the voluntary nature of the arrangement; length of flexiplace assignment; hours and days of duty for each work site; responsibilities for timekeeping, leave approval, and requests for overtime and compensatory time; performance requirements; proper use and safeguards of government property and

records; standards of conduct; and completion of required pilot program evaluation materials.

WORK SCHEDULES

Work performed away from the conventional office will vary depending upon the individual arrangements between employees and their supervisors. Flexiplace arrangements can be established on a continuing basis or on an ad-hoc, short-term basis.

For flexiplace arrangements established on a continuing basis, each work agreement shall provide for a minimum number of days in the office. Under normal circumstances, employees will work a minimum of three days in the conventional office. Successful programs have shown that employees need to spend at least part of the week in the conventional office to minimize isolation and communication problems, facilitate integration of the flexiplace employee with those in the conventional office, and to ease supervisors' adjustment.

Flexiplace arrangements may also be approved to permit an employee to work on an ad-hoc, short-term basis, for example when an employee could complete a project more efficiently or when an employee is temporarily incapacitated. In such cases, the work agreement should be as specific as possible concerning the schedule.

Work schedules identify the days and times the employee will work in each work setting. Work schedules can parallel those in the office or be structured to meet the needs of participating employees and their supervisors. The process of establishing work schedules permits periodic adjustments to achieve an optimal schedule which can meet organizational requirements and suit employee needs. Work schedules may also include fixed times during the day for supervisor/employee telephone conversations. Establishing such times may be helpful to ensure ongoing communication.

A regular schedule makes it easier to stay in touch with colleagues and to be available to clients. Supervisors must approve flexitime schedules in advance to preclude any unintended liability for premium or overtime pay and to ensure proper administration of other employee benefits. In addition, care must be taken not to approve any flexiplace schedule that is inconsistent or in conflict with provisions made under the Alternative Work Schedules program.

HOURS OF DUTY, TIME AND ATTENDANCE, AND PAY ISSUES

Hours of Duty. Supervisors may follow the traditional work schedule of eight hours per day, five days per week, 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; or permit employees to follow work schedules approved under the Alternative Work Schedule Program. Completely unstructured arrangements where employees work at the alternative

work site at will are not permitted.

Overtime Work. Work schedules, as described below, determine entitlement to overtime compensation.

Standard work schedule (currently 8:30 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.). Overtime work is all hours of work in excess of eight hours in a day or 40 hours in a week which are officially ordered in advance by management. Under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), employees may earn overtime pay even though the overtime work was voluntary and not officially ordered or approved. The FLSA counts as overtime any work that a supervisor "suffers or permits" his/her subordinates to work. "Suffered and permitted" overtime is any work performed for the benefit of the agency, whether ordered or not, provided the supervisor knew or had reason to believe that the work was being performed and had a chance to stop it.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to regulate and control the use of overtime. Employees are responsible for requesting, in advance, approval to work in excess of their normal hours of duty. This is particularly important when employees are working at home or a telecommuting center without direct supervisory oversight. The potential liability for FLSA overtime could be hard to control if clear directions are not provided to participating employees.

Flexible Work Schedules under the Alternative Work Schedule Program. Overtime work is all hours of work in excess of eight hours in a day or 40 hours in a week which are officially ordered in advance by management. The requirement that overtime hours be officially ordered in advance also applies to nonexempt employees under the FLSA. There is no concept of "suffer and permit" for overtime work performed under flexible work schedule programs.

Compressed Work Schedules under the Alternative Work Schedule Program. Overtime work is all hours officially ordered in excess of the established compressed work schedule. Overtime is not paid for hours worked in excess of eight hours per day or 40 hours per week when part of a compressed work schedule.

Certification and control of time and attendance. Proper monitoring and certification of employee work time is critical to the success of the program. The General Accounting Office guidelines regarding employees at remote sites require that agencies establish a time accounting method that provides the supervisor with reasonable assurance that employees at remote sites are working when scheduled. Some of the approved techniques mentioned which could be applicable to flexiplace arrangements include occasional supervisory telephone calls to an employee during times the employee is scheduled to be on duty; occasional visits by the supervisor to the employee's alternative work site; and determining the reasonableness of work output for the time spent.

Leave. The policies for requesting annual leave, sick leave, or leave without pay remain unchanged. Employees are responsible for requesting leave in advance from supervisors and keeping timekeepers informed of leave usage.

Administrative leave, dismissals, emergency closing. Although a variety of circumstances may affect individual situations, the principles governing administrative leave, dismissals, and closing remain unchanged. The ability to conduct work (and the nature of any impediments), whether at home, or at a telecommuting center, or at the conventional office, determines when an employee may be excused from duty. For example, if severe weather conditions and hazardous commuting difficulties necessitate the conventional office closing, and if the employee is working at home, normally, the flexiplace employee will continue working at home. Using this same example, if the employee's work site at home also is affected (the employee's electricity fails because of the severe storm), the supervisor may grant administrative leave. When an employee knows in advance of a situation that would preclude working at home, either time in the office or leave should be scheduled.

Workers' Compensation. Flexiplace employees are covered by the Federal Tort Claims Act or the Federal Employees Compensation Act and qualify for continuation of pay or workers' compensation for on-the-job injury or occupational illness. This is one reason that it is vital that a specific authorized work location must be identified in advance and adhered to by the employee. (See further discussion below in section titled, "FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT ISSUES.")

The supervisor's signature on the request for compensation attests only to what the supervisor can reasonably know, whether the event occurred at the conventional work site or at an alternative work site during official duty. Under normal circumstances, supervisors are often not present when an employee sustains an injury. Employees, in all situations, bear responsibility for informing their immediate supervisor of an injury at the earliest time possible. They must also provide details to the Department of Labor when filing a claim.

For employees who currently are receiving continuation of pay or workers' compensation, flexible work place arrangements can help put injured employees back to work and take them off the compensation rolls. Managers may be able to find work that such employees can perform at home, or managers may be able to "restructure" existing work so that some of it may be performed at home.

Duty Station. For pay purposes, the "official duty station" is the employee's conventional office. The employee's official duty station serves as the basis for determining special salary rates.

FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT ISSUES

Home alternative office. A specific authorized work location for performance of work-at-home duties must be identified in advance. Requirements will vary depending on the nature of the work and the equipment needed to perform the work. At a minimum, employees should be able to easily communicate by telephone with the supervisor during the work-at-home day. In addition, employees are responsible for verifying and ensuring that their homes comply with health and safety requirements. Home offices must be clean and free of obstructions. The home must be in compliance with all building codes and free of hazardous materials. A supervisor may deny an employee the opportunity to participate or may rescind a flexiplace agreement based on safety problems in the home or suspected hazardous materials in the home. The supervisor may also inspect the home office for compliance with health and safety requirements when deemed appropriate.

Home utility costs associated with working at home are not paid by the government. Potential savings to the employee resulting from reduced commuting, meals, etc. may offset any incidental increase in utility expenses. Exceptions apply only where the personal expense directly benefits the government, e.g., business-related long distance calls on the employee's personal phone.

Administration Directors must establish their own policy on purchase and installation of equipment. Some may agree to purchase or install equipment, while others, due to budget constraints or other management reasons, may choose not to. Administration Directors may make this decision on a case-by-case basis considering such factors as the nature of the work, availability of existing equipment, etc. In some instances, participation in the program may be contingent on equipment costs if equipment is needed to perform the job.

Transfer of government-owned computers, printers, modems and other data processing equipment from the Office to the home residence and back is determined by the Office. This equipment is to be used only for official business. The government must retain ownership and control of hardware, software, and data. In these situations, the government is responsible for maintenance, repair, and replacement of such equipment. Employees must notify supervisors immediately following a malfunction of government-owned equipment.

For government-owned computers, only hardware/software configuration procured by the Federal government and authorized by an approving official for the alternative work site should be installed. Under no circumstances should employees be allowed to add non-government owned or unauthorized hardware or software to the home work station. In addition, supervisors must ensure that the designated work space of the employee has adequate physical or environmental security measures in place to protect the equipment from being accessed by unauthorized

individuals.

If employees provide their own computer equipment, they do so at their option and are responsible for purchasing, servicing and maintenance costs. The government will not be liable for reimbursing employees for such costs.

For official government business only and specific to Flexiplace, Federal agencies may use appropriated funds to pay for telephone installation and basic services in private residences. The government cannot pay for a single line that will be used for both government and personal calls. The government can reimburse the employee for long distance calls made as part of official duties on a residential phone.

Telecommuting center office. Telecommuting centers which may be utilized are those established by the General Services Administration under the Interagency Telecommuting Pilot Project. For a nominal fee (at this time, \$100 per work station, per month), employees will have access to a wide array of modern equipment, including modular work stations, a telephone with local and FTS 2000 service, a high speed computer with a color monitor and modem, laser printer, facsimile machine, multi-function copier, conference and storage space. Training will be provided for employees at the centers and for supervisors and co-workers at each agency's central office.

Agencies wishing to use the telecommuting centers must enter into a 12-month agreement with the centers. For administrative convenience, the Office of Administration would consolidate requests for work stations within the telecommuting centers and establish one agreement per center. Payment would be made from one account with individual offices providing reimbursement. All costs must, of course, be absorbed within allocated operating budgets.

At least three telecommuting centers will be established in nearby Maryland and Virginia communities. At this time, a center in Winchester, Virginia has opened. In southern Maryland, a GSA team is working with a tri-county partnership that includes several public and private regional planning organizations and the Charles County Community College which has agreed to operate the center. GSA expects this center to open in mid-October 1993. Similar efforts are underway with public officials in other communities such as Hagerstown, Maryland; the Eastern Shore of Maryland; and Fredericksburg, Virginia.

PRIVACY ACT, SENSITIVE OR CLASSIFIED DATA

Decisions regarding the proper use and handling of sensitive data, as well as records subject to the Privacy Act, are delegated to individual supervisors who permit employees to work at home. Care must be taken to ensure that records subject to the Privacy Act and sensitive non-classified data are not disclosed to anyone

except to those who are authorized access to such information in order to perform their duties. Classified data may not be removed from employees' official work sites to off-site locations.

EVALUATION OF FLEXIPLACE PILOT PROGRAM

Evaluation of the pilot program is critical to determining the feasibility and desirability of flexiplace as an alternative work arrangement. As previously mentioned, Administration Directors are responsible for ensuring that periodic evaluations of the pilot program will be performed and providing appropriate reports to the Deputy Assistant Secretary. The Office of Human

Resources Management will assist with appropriate evaluation methodology.

NOAA SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDELINES FLEXIPLACE PILOT PROGRAM POLICY

Each Line/Staff/Program Office may choose to design its program within the parameters of the overall guidelines. Flexiplace policies and procedures should specify, at a minimum, the types of positions involved, the number of employees, associated costs, general schedules to be used, alternate work sites, and anticipated benefits.

The pilot program will be in effect for a minimum of one year in order to fully evaluate its benefits and impact on operations. Offices may begin participation in the pilot at any time.

RESPONSIBILITIES

APPROVING OFFICIALS will authorize all participation in the pilot within their organizations and will assure appropriate funding, evaluate the impact of the program on the efficiency, effectiveness, and employee satisfaction of work operations within their organizations. Approving officials are the Line/Staff/Program Directors or their designees.

SUPERVISORS will: 1) select the employees to participate from those individuals volunteering within the program areas authorized by the Approving Official; 2) develop and amend performance work plans as needed for work performed away from the official duty station; 3) assign appropriate work to be performed at the alternate duty station; 4) adjust individual flexiplace arrangements to meet the needs of the units they supervise; and 5) maintain records and information necessary for evaluation of the program.

EMPLOYEES will: 1) provide information to complete work agreements; 2) observe agreed-upon hours of work in accordance with established policies; 3) observe policies on requesting leave when leave is to be taken; and 4) use Government equipment only for official purposes.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Identifying the Position

Selection of suitable positions is the first step toward participating in the pilot program. After deciding that a certain position has Flexiplace possibilities, other criteria must be explored.

Contact Requirements

1. What percentage of the job is devoted to "face-to-face" contact with co-workers, other employees or agencies, or the public?
2. Can contact be readjusted to allow for telephone or electronic

communications or can such contact be conducted when the employee is at the conventional office?

Reference Material Requirements

1. What percentage of the job relies upon access to photocopiers, telefax machines, or other specialized equipment?
2. Can access needs be grouped and scheduled for days when the employee is in the conventional office?

Travel Requirements

3. Can trips begin or end at the alternate worksite rather than the main office?
4. Can paperwork be done at the alternate worksite?

FORMS REQUIRED

5. A Flexiplace Work Agreement (Attachment B) is required for all participants.
6. The Flexiplace Screen Out Criteria Checklist (Attachment C) must be completed by the supervisor prior to approval of the flexiplace agreement. Answering yes to any of the questions will normally eliminate a person from consideration in the flexiplace program.
7. The Flexiplace Safety Inspection Checklist (Attachment D) must be completed by the employee and the supervisor before the Flexiplace Work Agreement may be approved.

TRAINING

Both employee participants and their supervisors must attend a training session prior to participation and should be coordinated with the appropriate servicing Human Resource Office.

SATELLITE OFFICES

Offices that wish to make this alternate work site available to their employees, must work with the NOAA Human Resources Management Office to make sure contractual agreements are met.

EQUIPMENT

Each Office may establish its own policy on purchase and installation of equipment. All equipment deemed necessary by the supervisor for completion of off-site work assignments will be provided by the organization within the parameters of governing laws, rules, and regulations, and budgetary constraints.

EVALUATION

The NOAA Human Resources Management Office will coordinate the evaluation of the pilot program in conjunction with the Department of Commerce, participating offices, and the Office of Personnel

Management and the General Services Administration as appropriate. Supervisors and participants are required to complete evaluation questionnaires at the beginning of the participation and each six months afterwards.

CONTACTS

Please contact your servicing Human Resources Management Office if you have any questions about the flexiplace program or would like assistance in setting up your program.

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING FLEXIPLACE PARTICIPANTS

Identifying the Supervisor

- The supervisor is a proponent of the project.
- The supervisor is comfortable with evaluating work performance by measuring performance by results and without direct observation.
- The supervisor is an effective communicator and able to clearly define tasks and expectations and provide ongoing feedback.

Identifying the Employee

- The employee has demonstrated self-starter characteristics, can function independently and has demonstrated dependability.
- The employee has good time management and organization skills.
- The employee possesses a high level of skill and job knowledge.
- The employee's overall performance evaluations are equivalent to fully successful or higher.
- The employee has clearly defined performance standards.
- The employee is willing to sign and abide by a written agreement defining participation and expectations.
- If the alternative work site is the home, the employee is able to satisfy home work station requirements, including necessary equipment, privacy, lack of interruptions, and security of data.

Identifying the Position

- Many different positions lend themselves to successful flexiplace arrangements. Each position should be examined, and specifically, distinct activities, functions, and tasks. In many cases, some portion of the position may be performed in a flexiplace environment.

- Work activities are portable and can be performed effectively outside the conventional office.
- Job tasks primarily are measurable or primarily project oriented.
- Contact with other employees and serviced clientele is predictable.
- Work contacts can be easily adjusted to allow for telephone communications or conducted when the flexiplace employee is at the conventional office.
- The technology needed to perform the work off-site is currently available.
- Security of data can be adequately assured.
- Access to specialized equipment or materials not present at the off-site location can be grouped and scheduled for days when the flexiplace employee is in the conventional office.

ATTACHMENT B

FLEXIPLACE PROGRAM
EMPLOYEE/SUPERVISOR AGREEMENT

The following constitutes an agreement on the terms and conditions of the Flexiplace Program between:

Organization:

Employee:

1. Employee volunteers to participate in the Flexiplace Program.

Employee voluntarily agrees to work at the agency-approved alternate workplace indicated below and agrees to adhere to the applicable guidelines and policies. The Flexiplace Screen Out Criteria Checklist (attached) has been completed by the supervisor. The supervisor concurs with employee participation and agrees to adhere to the applicable guidelines and policies.

2. Choose one:

____ Employee agrees to participate in the program for a period not to exceed 120 days beginning _____. Extensions may be provided contingent upon review and approval.

OR

____ Employee will participate in the program on an ad-hoc, short term basis to accommodate special needs for a period not to exceed _____.
_____.

NOTE: The employee or management may terminate participation in this program at any time.

3. Employee's most recent performance rating of record and current performance must be at the "Meets or Exceeds" level. Employee will complete assigned work according to supervisor's guidance and direction and according to standards stated in the employee's performance plan.

4. Employee's official tour of duty will be (indicate hours and days of duty for each work site). If employee is on a flexible work schedule, indicate core hours.
Conventional Office

From: _____

To: _____

on the following days:_____

Alternate Office

From:_____ To:_____

on the following days:

5. Employee's official duty station is:_____

The alternate duty station is:

(The conventional Federal office is the official duty station for purposes of special salary rates.)

The telephone number at the alternate duty station is:

6. Employee's timekeeper will have a copy of the employee's flexiplace schedule. The supervisor and employee are responsible for ensuring the accuracy of time and attendance reported for work at the official duty station and the alternate workplace.

7. Employee will follow established office procedures for requesting and obtaining approval of leave.

8. Employee agrees to work overtime only when ordered and approved by the supervisor in advance. Working overtime without such approval may result in termination of the flexiplace privilege and/or other appropriate action.

9. If employee borrows government equipment, employee will borrow and protect the equipment in accordance with applicable procedures. Government-owned equipment will be serviced and maintained by the government. If employee provides own equipment, this is at option of employee, who is responsible for purchasing, servicing and maintenance costs. The government will not be liable for reimbursing employees for such costs.

10. The employee has conducted a safety inspection of home (if alternate work site) using the Flexiplace Safety Inspection Checklist (Attachment D). The employee agrees to permit the government to inspect the alternate workplace with 24 hours notice during the employee's normal working hours to ensure proper maintenance of government-owned property and conformance with health and safety standards.

11. The employee is covered under the Federal Employee's Compensation Act if injured in the course of actually performing official duties at the official duty station or the alternate duty station. The employee agrees to notify the supervisor immediately

of any accident or injury which occurs. The supervisor will investigate such a report immediately.

12. The government will not be liable for damages to an employee's personal or real property during performance of official duties or while using government equipment in the employee's residence, except to the extent the government is held liable by Federal Tort Claims Act claims or claims arising under the Military Personnel and Civilian Employees Claims Act.

13. The government will not be responsible for operating costs, home maintenance, or any other incidental costs (e.g., utilities) whatsoever, associated with the use of the employee's residence. By participating in the flexiplace program, the employee does not relinquish any entitlement to reimbursement for authorized expenses incurred while conducting business for the government, as provided for by statute and implementing regulations.

14. At intervals specified in the flexiplace guide, the supervisor and the employee will complete surveys which summarize flexiplace impact on the office, the employee, the supervisor, and other organizational elements.

NOS Additional Requirement:

15. The supervisor has the option and authority to request the employee to attend a meeting at his/her duty station or be available for a conference call with a minimum notice of 2 hours.

Employee's signature

Date

Supervisor's signature

Date

Approving Official's signature

Date

SCREEN OUT CRITERIA CHECKLIST

Employee's Name: _____

Title, Series, Grade: _____

1. Frequent face-to-face contacts with clients and/or co-workers is vital in order to complete this project. YES___NO___

2. Frequent supervisory review, while work is in progress, is required as a routine part of this job. YES___NO___

3. Security or technical reasons prevent information from being used at the alternate duty station which is needed to perform the work effectively. YES___NO___

4. Most recent performance rating does not meet expectations. YES___NO___

5. Are there dependent children or adults who will be at the alternate duty station during the times the employee is scheduled to work AND may require the attention of the employee during these times? YES___NO___

6. Are there any other kinds of disturbances which would distract the employee from performing work at the alternate duty station? YES___NO___

Answering YES to any of the above questions will normally eliminate a person from consideration in the flexiplace program. Provide explanation below if employee is screened out on one or more criteria and is still being recommended for the flexiplace program.

Supervisor's signature: _____ Date

SAFETY INSPECTION CHECKLIST

NOTE: Some information on this form is protected by the Privacy Act. Disclosure may be made only to authorized persons according to 5 U.S.C. 552a.

SECTION 1 - EMPLOYEE AND WORKSITE INFORMATION

Employee's Name: _____

Alternate Duty Station Address:

Telephone Number at Alternate Duty Station: _____

Briefly describe worksite location within the alternate duty station:

SECTION 2 - LIST OF ITEMS/CONDITIONS TO INSPECT

The following checklist is designed to assess the overall safety of the alternate worksite. Each participant should read and complete the self-certification safety checklist. Upon completion, the checklist should be signed and dated by the participating employee and immediate supervisor.

- a. To the extent it can be determined, is the work area free of indoor air quality problems? YES___NO___N/A___
- b. Is the space free of noise hazards? YES___NO___N/A___
- c. Is there a potable (drinkable) water supply? YES___NO___N/A___
- d. Is adequate ventilation present for the desired occupancy? YES___NO___N/A___
- e. Are lavatories available with hot/cold running water? YES___NO___N/A___
- f. Are all stairs with four or more steps equipped with handrails? YES___NO___N/A___
- g. Are all circuit breakers and/or fuses for the work area labeled as to intended service? YES___NO___N/A___
- h. Do circuit breakers clearly indicate if they are in the open or closed position? YES___NO___N/A___
- i. Is all electrical equipment free of YES___NO___N/A___

recognized hazards which would cause physical harm (frayed wires, bare conductors, loose wires, overuse of extension cords, exposed wires fixed to the ceiling, etc.)?

j. Is all electrical equipment properly grounded? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

k. Is there a smoke detector in or near the work area? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

l. Is there a fire extinguisher near the work area? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

m. Are aisles, doorways, and corners free of obstructions to permit visibility and movement? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

n. Are file cabinets and storage closets arranged so drawers and doors do not open into hallways? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

o. Is the work area furnished so that there is adequate room to safely move around? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

p. Is furniture sturdy (e.g., no loose legs, tops, backs, casters, wheels, rungs, etc.)? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

q. Do chairs provide adequate back support for the work to be accomplished? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

r. Is the work area free of all tripping hazards, including telephone lines, electrical cords, extension wires, etc. YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

s. Is the work area neat and clean? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

t. Are the floor surfaces clean, dry, level, with any carpets secured and free of worn or frayed seams? YES ___ NO ___ N/A ___

NOTE: Employee is responsible for informing the supervisor of any change to the work area which results in a safety status change, or if any accidents occur while working at the alternate duty station.

SECTION 3

I have conducted the above safety inspection of the worksite area of the alternate duty station. The results of the inspection are noted above. I understand that an independent safety inspection may be conducted onsite with 24 hours notice and during my normal working hours.

Employee's signature: _____ Date _____

APPROVED _____

DISAPPROVED _____

The following actions are required for this alternate duty station
to meet the safety checklist standards:

Supervisor's signature: _____ Date _____

FAMILY CARE NEEDS

Flexiplace is a family-friendly initiative but there seems to be a lot of confusion as to what this entails. To some employees they think it's the solution to childcare and eldercare and it's not. Childcare or eldercare is a job in itself and employee's cannot do two jobs at once. So, if children or senior family members are in the home who require care from the employee, other arrangements must be made to care for them during the employee's hours of work just as if they were in the conventional office. Flexiplace is a family-friendly initiative because it allows increased flexibility in an employee's work schedule to meet their everyday and emergency family care needs, increases time with family members by eliminating commuting times, and gives employees a more secure feeling that if an emergency occurs they will be close-by on those work-at-home days. First, however, the position and employee must both meet the criteria for Flexiplace and there must be sufficient work to do at the home location. Following are Flexiplace scenarios meeting an employee's family care needs.

SCENARIO #1 - Full-Time Flexiplace Arrangement

Employee lives an hour's drive from the office and has elementary school age children at home. Without Flexiplace the employee must take the children to a childcare provider for before-and- after school care five days a week because they cannot stay home with the children until they leave for school, commute an hour's drive and still get to work by 9:30 a.m., and then be home in time when the child arrives from school. With a Flexiplace arrangement the employee could:

o Save money by reducing the child care to two or three days a week and increase time with the children. To do this the employee could work two days at home or combine that with a day off from working a 4-day AWS schedule. In order to meet the requirement of work and family two example schedules could be as follows:

- Monday, Wednesday and Friday work in the conventional office 8:00 a.m.-4:30/5:30 p.m. (2 9-hour days as necessary to make up for a shorter work schedule when they work at home). Children in before-and-after school care.

- Tuesday and Thursday work at home 9:00 a.m.-3:30 p.m. with a 2-hour break in schedule when children come home from school and

until spouse arrives to tend to children. Employee would then finish a 7-hour day from 5:30 p.m.-6:30 p.m.

Or

- Monday and Wednesday work in the conventional office 6:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (10-hour day). Children in before-and-after school care.
- Tuesday and Thursday work at home 6:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (10-hour day). Child care could be accomplished by the spouse getting the children ready and off to school in the morning and then a teenage babysitter in the afternoon from 3:30 p.m.-5:00 p.m.
- Friday is the AWS day off so no childcare would be required.

In this scenario the children are old enough to be in school. Work schedules may need to be modified during the summer break. Obviously for preschool age children this arrangement would not save much money because childcare arrangements would still be required every day except if the employee has an AWS day off. However, there would still be the benefit of spending more time with the children and less in daycare by eliminating the 2-hour commuting time and, if possible, staggering a spouse's work schedule.

If the children were teenagers and capable of taking care of themselves, a Flexiplace arrangement would provide the benefit of reducing the children's time at home alone before and after school. The parent would be able to react immediately to emergencies.

SCENARIO #2 - Short-Term/Ad Hoc Flexiplace Arrangement

Employee lives an hour and a half drive from work. A family member (e.g., child, elder parent) breaks a leg and needs care for one month and, after that, physical therapy twice a week for another two months. Without Flexiplace, the employee would have to take a lot of leave over the three-month period and the agency would have lost productivity. With a Flexiplace arrangement the employee could:

- o Reduce their leave usage by working a portion of the day/week the first month and working full time for the last two months. The employee or a co-worker could pickup/drop off work or work could be transmitted electronically back and forth. The agency benefits by having the employee working part time instead of losing all productivity. To meet the family care needs an example of a Flexiplace schedule could be:

Month 1:

-Monday-Friday work 6:30 a.m.-10:00 a.m. and then take 4 and a half hours leave. The employee's spouse provides care before they leave for work in the morning. The employee then takes over the rest of the day.

Months 2 and 3:

-Monday, Wednesday, Friday work at the office 7:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Family member is well enough to go to childcare, school or stay at home by themselves.

- Tuesday and Thursday work at home 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 a.m., break to take family member to physical therapy, then complete tour of duty from 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. All required childcare or arrangements with spouse are still in place. At the end of physical therapy, employee ends Flexiplace and returns to the conventional office.

This scenario provides maximum flexibility for the employee. By eliminating the 3-hour commute, the employee is able to turn that time into productivity for the agency and reduced leave usage while still meeting their family care needs. However, as in all Flexiplace arrangements, the determination must be made first that the employee and position lends itself to Flexiplace and that there actually is enough work to keep the employee busy for their scheduled work hours.

SCENARIO #3 - Short-Term/Ad Hoc Flexiplace Arrangement

An employee lives an hour's drive from work. The employee requests a Flexiplace arrangement during their teenage children's summer vacation. Without Flexiplace the employee's children would be home alone for a large portion of the day. With Flexiplace the employee could:

- o Be more accessible for emergencies and, by saving 2-hours commuting time, increase time with the children. An example work schedule could be as follows:

-Monday and Wednesday work 6:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (10 hours) in the conventional office.

-Tuesday and Thursday work 6:30 a.m.-11:00 a.m., break an hour for lunch, then finish the workday 12:00 noon-5:30 p.m. (10 hours) at home. Employee is immediately available to their children in case of emergencies.

-Friday is the AWS day off so employee is with the children all day.

SCENARIO #4 - Short-Term/Ad Hoc Flexiplace Arrangement

Employee requests Flexiplace for the first 4 months after his wife has a baby. Without Flexiplace the employee may need to take a lot of leave to help out at home. With Flexiplace the employee could:

- o Reduce leave usage by arranging a schedule to help out at home and still continue a full work schedule and reduce stress by eliminating 2 days of commute and being there in case of an emergency. An example schedule could be:

- Monday, Wednesday and Friday work 7:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. at the conventional office.

- Tuesday and Thursday work 8:00 a.m.-12:00 noon, 2-hour break in schedule to help as needed, then continue work from 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. Working at home allows the employee to catch up on sleep and spend time with his family throughout the day rather than at the end of the day when everyone is too tired.

These are just a few scenarios of how Flexiplace can address family care needs. In all of these, required childcare or eldercare is accomplished by someone other than the employee during the employee's work hours at home. The keys to establishing a successful Flexiplace arrangement for family care needs is flexibility, good communication between the supervisor and employee and an understanding by both of what is allowed and expected of the employee.